When an organization makes the decision to install a computer, it is taking a step that is usually larger in scope than it appears on the surface. The success of the venture will be determined by how well the organization does its planning. The strength of the plan will enable the computer to be used to its full potential.

So said Fred Andrus of the San Diego Zoo/Wild Animal Park (P.O. Box 551, San Diego, CA 92112) in a September 1982 presentation about computer use, before an American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums meeting in Phoenix, Ariz. Andrus edits the Zoo's new animal collection computerization newsletter, Animal Bytes, which acts as a clearinghouse for information about the computerization of animal records to help those in the field avoid costly mistakes or adopt a process that has proven successful.

More and more humane societies, animal-control departments, and other animal-related groups are considering the use of a computer to maintain accurate animal records, speed information retrieval.
and thereby maximize employees' time and improve public service, share animal information with other organizations, and assist efforts to combat the still-serious pet overpopulation problem. There is no set rule about the type of computer system to use or the amount of money to spend for its purchase and maintenance. In fact, these factors depend on an organization's size, budget, and specific information needs. It is very important, however, for an organization to determine its computer needs before the purchase is made.

The Animal Shelter Management System, developed with the cooperation of a local animal shelter by Business Computer Services Inc. (BCS) (P.O. Box 584, South Dartmouth, MA 02748), operates on Televideo microcomputers that can be tailored to meet individual needs and budgets. (It is also available for other computer systems.) This system allows file maintenance for lost animals; animal licenses, quarantines and burials; and animal abusers. It also provides for an operator animal search, a lost animal search, drug disposition record, drug transaction tracking, drug order recording, and drug inventory control. Fund accounting and word processing capabilities round out the system. Service is available through TRW, a nationwide service corporation.

According to BCS President Robert Affonso, "Too many computer buyers make the mistake of selecting the computer hardware first. Most often, they discover that the necessary software programs are unavailable or, if available, that the computer hardware is inadequate to support the processing requirements." He said BCS has attempted to ease the selection, installation, and daily use of a computing system by providing a dedicated software package, adequate hardware that can be easily expanded as needs increase, and complete installation, training, and customer support. Service is available through TRW, a nationwide service corporation.

Affonso said the first step for anyone contemplating the purchase of a computer system is to list the things they want the computer to do, which establishes the system's software requirements. Next, the buyer should estimate the amount of information to be processed. For example, BCS gives potential customers a "customer sizing form" that asks such questions as the number of animals received, claimed, adopted, boarded, transported, altered, euthanized, cremated, buried, or quarantined every month. It also asks how many letters and newsletters are prepared. If the group each month, how many employees there are, how many vehicles the group maintains, and more. This information, combined with the specific software requirements, helps determine the necessary equipment. Hardware is then selected to meet the needs of the software. The system is designed around the "need to do," and the software is then written to work with the hardware.

The Animal Shelter Management System is currently in use at the Minneapolis and St. Paul Humane Society. It is one of the first systems developed specifically for animal shelters and incorporates many of the features discussed in this article. The system is currently being marketed by BCS and is available for 

Subscription rates:

- New or renewals: $6.00
- Student subscriptions: $4.00 each
- Group subscriptions: $5.00 each

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A new book that explains the work of animal shelters through the story of a stray puppy, and a cat whose owner must give it up, would be a perfect addition to any community library, veterinarian's office, or humane education program classroom.

Pets Without Homes, by Caroline Arnold, with attractive photographs by Richard Hewett, was produced with the cooperation of the Santa Monica Animal Shelter (1640 9th St., Santa Monica, CA 90401) and the Santa Monica Assistance League School.

The hardcover, 48-page book, designed for youngsters aged three-to-eight years, describes how Animal Control Officer Terrie Lee finds Buffy, a puppy, with no identification and takes him to the animal shelter. Buffy is examined by a veterinarian, and while awaiting adoption, visits a school as part of the shelter’s humane education program. Max, the cat, and Buffy are eventually adopted out to responsible, loving homes.

The story explains the various duties of an animal-control officer and shelter workers, and it emphasizes important messages about responsible pet care, the need for animal ordinances, spaying and neutering. Simply and tastefully, it mentions the need to euthanize animals because there are not enough responsible homes for them.

At $10.95, the book is available from Clarion Books, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, NY 10017; (212) 972-1190.

Children can learn about responsible pet ownership and animal-shelter work while they have fun with The Official Richmond SPCA Activity Book.

Created by Janet Stewart and Carol Cockburn of The Richmond SPCA (1600 Chamberlayne Ave., Richmond, VA 23222), and published with the assistance of the Mid-Atlantic Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the 24-page booklet contains games, puzzles, and quizzes for third- through sixth-grade children (although all ages can enjoy it) and emphasizes important messages about spaying and neutering, providing identification tags for, leashing, licensing, feeding, and grooming pets.

"They make ideal gifts for children who may be confined by sickness or are traveling long distances," said Margaret Williams, executive director of The SPCA.

To receive a copy, send a $1 donation plus 40 cents for postage. The booklet can also be ordered in bulk: The postage rate for 6-10 copies is $1.35; 50 booklets, $3.97; 100 booklets, $6.35. No sales tax is required.

Two new 1994 calendars with lots of room for writing in important appointments, and with full-color framable photos of cats or dogs, would make practical fund-raisers for animal groups.

Bo-Tree Productions (1137 San Antonio Rd., Suite E, Palo Alto, CA 94303; (415) 967-1817) created the 12" x 12" calendars and will donate a portion of the profits from their sale to The Humane Society of the United States.

In The Company of Cats and Doggone retail for $6.95 each and wholesale for $4.70 per dozen. A minimum order of 12 calendars is required. Orders of 12-47 are discounted 40 percent; 48 or more are billed at 50 percent. If payment accompanies order, freight is free (free-on-board shipping point unless invoice is prepaid).

WANTED - Shelter manager. Experienced in animal care and humane work. Good public relations skills. College degree preferred. Send resume and letter to James Anasiewicz, director, Tompkins County SPCA, 1640 Hanshaw Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850; telephone (607) 257-1822.

WANTED - Shelter manager. Experienced. Responsible for medium-sized shelter and staff. Salary range, $12,000 - $14,400. Send application and resume to Executive Director, Humane Society of Central Oregon, 61170 S.E. 27th St., Bend, OR 97702.

WANTED - Executive director. Mature, and experienced in humane society. Overseer operation of animal shelter handling 6,000 animals annually, cruelty investigations, public relations, educational activities. Salary negotiable. Send resume, references to Kathy Seward, board president, Animal Rescue League of Iowa Inc., 5452 N.E. 22nd St., Des Moines, IA 50313.
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list of software requirements, will establish the computer processing speed, memory and mass storage requirements, as well as printer characteristics.

The third step is for the potential buyer to locate the software package that most closely meets the listed software requirements or system. The final step is to locate a computing system capable of running the selected software package, while providing the speed and memory requirements listed as a result of step two.

Affonso said a computer buyer should also find out who will install the system and at what cost, how much time will be provided for learning the computer and the program, and what the cost will be for additional training. The buyer should also determine whether the software is supported by the dealer, whether modifications can be made and programs expanded, what that cost will be, who will service the computer, to what extent the computer can be expanded, and what other items will be needed such as disks, paper or cables.

The cost of the BCS Animal Shelter Management System, depending upon the type of multi-user computer is chosen and other factors, ranges from $6,799 to $19,790. (Prices vary for New England-area shelters.) All prices include installation and two days' training, with additional training available at reasonable rates. Affonso said the Animal Tracking and Recording Program can be purchased alone; however, it would not include the fund accounting or word processing programs or the associated hardware, installation, or training. Software installation, initialization, and training would also be up to the customer.

Another group offers a very simple computer system for matching data on lost and found cats and dogs, available to 38 Rhode Island communities and nearby Massachusetts at no cost to animal shelters or pet owners.

Defenders of Animals Inc. (P.O. Box 5634, Weybosset Hill Station, Providence, RI 02903) began the Computerized Animal Tracking System (CATS) in 1982 with the hope of reuniting pets and owners or finding new homes for animals.

"People are much more aware of the techniques for finding their lost pets...by following guidelines that they received when they called us," said Dennis Tabella, president of Defenders of Animals Inc. and director of CATS. "Anyone who can describe a pet could use our form, and after a few tries, it should only take two-to-three minutes to describe a pet over the phone line."

The system uses a simple, standard form that can be followed by all area municipal- and humane-society shelter workers. Information from the form, including an animal's color, ear and tail disposition, collar type, age, sex, etc., is entered in a Texas Instruments computer. The computer cost the group approximately $300 with a $100 rebate, and the hardware cost below $300. The system runs off a Panasonic tape deck (model #RQ-2309A) and can accommodate 16,000 characters. Although there are special tapes for recording computer information, Tabella said a Memorex tape works just fine. Tabella emphasized that anyone can learn to use the system.

"I started CATS with no previous knowledge of the computer or software," he said. "To date, the system has neither run out of space nor has it shut down. I would suggest users learn how the system works, by themselves, from the manuals that come with the computer. Anyone looking at the $25 TV screen could understand every word."

CATS has received coverage by two major Rhode Island TV stations, a cable TV station, local newspaper, and radio station. But Tabella said CATS has had some problems getting cooperation from other humane groups. "We honestly find that we are receiving more cooperation from dog officers than we are from some of the humane groups," he said, "which, needless to say, is only hurting pets and their families."

Some municipal animal-control departments and shelters are working through their city's main computer system, which may still require the purchase of their own terminal and hookup equipment.

The Iowa City Animal Shelter (410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240) uses that city's main computer, located at the civic center. A portable terminal is hooked up to the shelter's phone line; a second phone line allows calls to come in from the public when the computer is in use. The city doesn't charge the shelter to use the main computer, but the shelter pays for employee time to enter and update computer data. Two officers are trained to do everything from data entry to final printouts.

According to Beverly Horton, shelter supervisor, the computer is used primarily to license pets. The computer prints complete information about each licensed pet on a renewal postcard, which the shelter mails to the owner. Owners then return the renewal cards with their payment for the upcoming year and a new rabies certificate, if re-vaccination is required (see Shelter Sense, April 1982). All pet licenses are listed numerically, and the list is placed in the shelter office as well as with the city's police department. The list allows a tag to be traced 24 hours daily, seven days per week.

Licensed pets are also listed alphabetically by owners' names. This list is located in the shelter's truck and office. Licensed pets are listed by breed, too. Also located in the truck and office, this list assists workers in identifying animals that are roaming as well as in handling other complaints such as barking dogs.
Traveling Shows May Pose Animal Problems

by Jeanne Roush

No doubt, from time to time, you have encountered situations where animals are used in fund-raising events by various groups—most often by well-intentioned service clubs. Usually, such groups contract with traveling shows that consist of exhibits, performing animal acts, or public picture-taking sessions with animals such as lion cubs.

The Humane Society of the United States' (HSUS) own investigations, and reports we receive from government agencies and the public, show that many of these shows are fraught with a variety of problems that are not always readily apparent. As a humane society or animal-control department, you are in an excellent position to educate your community about the possible problems these shows may pose. Once alerted to these unfortunate possibilities, the community will be better able to scrutinize the quality of the exhibit they will be getting.

Listed below are the types of problems the HSUS has seen:

* generally inhumane living conditions for the animals regarding such things as space, food, ambient temperature control, veterinary care, sanitation, and protection from the public;
* safety hazards to the public, some of which have resulted in serious injuries and lawsuits;
* solicitation of donations under false pretenses;
* nonpayment of funds to groups with whom the act has contracted;
* exhibiting without the necessary federal and local licenses and permits;
* misinformation about animals given to the public, and
* improper provisions for waste disposal, resulting in violations of local health ordinances.

This list is not complete, but it may be helpful when addressing this issue in your community. A letter from your organization to groups that have either exhibited animals in the past or are likely to do so in the future may be much appreciated, and it will allow them to make an informed choice that will save them the costly mistake of bad publicity—or even a lawsuit.

For more information, please feel free to contact the Captive Wildlife Protection Department of The HSUS.

Jeanne Roush is the assistant to the director for Captive Wildlife Protection at The HSUS.

Young visitors to a local New Orleans, La., zoo recently learned the perils of irresponsible pet ownership during a play produced by the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) (1319 Japonica St., New Orleans, LA 70117).

Herbert Gets It Together, written and directed by an SPCA volunteer, Mary Flynn-Thomas, told the story of a hound dog named Herbert and his feline friend, Clyde, who didn’t think they needed to obey animal-control and leash laws. Through a series of comical incidents, the pair learned the importance of animal shelters and laws designed to protect both animals and people.

The play was performed last summer for approximately 400 viewers three times daily on two Sundays at the local Audubon Zoo and at “Zoobilation,” the annual party for Friends of the Zoo members.

“I feel we are constantly approaching the public for donations, and we wanted this to be something we did for them, instead,” said Marie Gould, SPCA education director.

The 25-minute show is based on a puppet show by Audubon Zoo Education Curator Debra Bresler. Herbert and Clyde, watched after by a worried poodle, Fifi, gradually discovered the drawbacks to eating out of trash cans, rooting through neighbors' gardens and risking auto injuries and human abuse by wandering outside a fenced yard. They also learned the importance of wearing rabies and identification tags and a leash as well as being spayed or neutered. They saw abandoned and unwanted animals and heard about the stress of lengthy confinement in a shelter, and they learned about the problems of adopting out animals, the services of the SPCA, and the often-undeserved reputation of animal-control officers.

Professional actors were not employed, according to Gould, but the amateur actors were “great hams.” “We had an attorney (Clyde, the only), a photographer (Herbert), a TV producer (Fifi), a business woman (the veterinarian), and a U.S. Marine (the animal-control officer). All did a professional job and thoroughly enjoyed the experience,” said Gould in a letter to Shelter Sense Editor Debbie Reed.

Costumes were designed by a local man whose family has made Mardi Gras costumes for generations. His employees sewed the outfits, without charge, and the SPCA paid only for the materials. The SPCA’s maintenance man built the stage props. “These people were a big bonus to the production,” said Gould. The play was featured on the local TV evening news.

The SPCA is preparing a proposal for funds to hire professional actors to perform the play at the zoo, one school day each week, in order to reach new children touring there. (Could explain touring there.

The group is also seeking a grant, enabling them to perform once a week in local schools. Actors would return on stage after performances to discuss with the children the information in the play, and they would hand out literature about responsible pet ownership and animal control.

The SPCA hopes to produce their own videotape of the play using equipment borrowed from a local cable television company. It would be narrated by the play’s director, who would break up scenes with actual street and shelter scenes and a voice-over, telling viewers about the realities of incidents in the play. The videotape would be shown in local schools.
"Computers," continued from page 7

Last, all licensed pets are listed by street address. Horton said this is very effective for identifying an animal’s owner when its description is vague or incomplete. If, for example, a “black” cat has bitten a child, a quick check of the list will tell workers where in the surrounding area a black cat is located.

"One of the greatest benefits of the computer is the accessibility of information to those in the field," said Horton. The computer billing or notification process is convenient not only for our department, but for pet owners, who appreciate being able to mail in license applications.

"Our use of the computer is satisfactory at this time," she said. "I could find many additional uses for a larger operation, but that would involve higher costs, detailed programming, and lots of employee time for data entry."

The City of Los Angeles Data Center serves as the base for the Department of Animal Regulation’s (Room 1650, City Hall East, 200 N. Main St., Los Angeles, CA 90012) new custom-designed computerized Animal Management Information System (AMIS).

"We are very proud of this system," said Robert Rush, the department’s general manager. "AMIS gives us instant access to a vast fund of information of widespread value to this and other agencies."

The department can identify the location of animals within its jurisdiction, track compliance with rabies vaccinations, license animals, and inventory animals held in shelters and elsewhere. In the future, the system may be expanded to handle permit- and complaint management as well as operations accounting.

The system uses three software packages for report writing: ASI-ST, FOCUS, and SAS. The department can prepare any report from any data field or combination of data fields, and any data set or segment within a data field can be used. Alleged offenders can be pinpointed and used. According to Rush, report headings and formats are most effectively controlled through ASI-ST, which gives the best report appearance. FOCUS, however, is an easier system to use, but the results are not as effectively "manipulated." SAS is a statistical package: Any standard statistic, as well as comparatively sophisticated statistical analyses, is available. The system is capable of tracking daily lost/found, spay/neuter, rabies vaccination, and other information with other agencies, but the applicable programming has not yet been done. The group don’t participate in a data-sharing network.

Rush said the Data Center uses IBM equipment and an IMS environment. The department paid $125,000 for the necessary software, designed and installed by Computer Assistance Inc., a private vendor, and made possible by Mayor Tom Bradley and the City Council through an appropriation from the city’s general fund. An annual appropriation of approximately $140,000 will be necessary to continue financing the video display terminals, printers, communication lines, central processor, and salaries for the technical support personnel, he said.

Forty-four clerical workers plus administrative and supervisory personnel are trained to operate AMIS. Animal-control workers operate AMIS at night, on weekends and holidays, when no clerical workers are available.

Rush said AMIS’ best feature is its ability to compare animal owners’ addresses and determine the existence of an unlicensed dog. As a result, unlicensed dogs can be identified more quickly and economically, he said.

"We have licensed more dogs, with fewer employees, than ever before in our history," said Rush. He explained that the greatest volume of licensed dogs (266,325) was in fiscal year 1970-71. Just before the implementation of AMIS (1981-82), 145,849 dogs were licensed—a constant decrease of 5.33 percent per year.

Based upon that trend, he said, the department anticipated issuing 138,586 licenses in 1982-83. Instead, 190,754 dog licenses were issued. (The actual increase was 44,905, but based upon the trend, the increase was closer to 52,728, he said.)

"This is a dramatic first-year increase that cannot be expected to continue at this level," said Rush. "We processed a backlog of information economically, but we anticipate a less dramatic increase over the normal long run."

The department has contracted with Computer Assistance Inc. to provide a finer accounting of departmental revenues, which will reduce the time needed for accounting personnel to do this. The company will also create a machine-generated receipt for whenever funds are received over the counter from the public, which will reduce necessary clerical time for each transaction as well as the potential for errors.

No matter the type of computer purchased, no matter its cost, advance planning by informed decision makers can ensure your organization a computer system that streamlines — and thereby improves — public service and animal welfare.

Jefferson Parish, La., man was recently sentenced to six months in jail and ordered to pay $1,000 after he was convicted of cruelty to his dog.

According to Bert Smith, information specialist at the Jefferson Parish Animal Shelter, Alford Newman of Gretna was convicted in June by Second Parish Court Judge Dennis Hebert for throwing his female Eskimo-type dog on the ground, breaking her leg, and causing her other injuries. Newman never admitted he injured the dog, said Smith, but the judge warned him against doing such a thing again.

A woman who worked across the street, and saw the incident, called sheriff’s deputies to the scene, who then called the animal shelter. Animal-Control Officer William Borras confirmed the dog’s injuries, arrested Newman, and took the animal to a shelter veterinarian. The dog, approximately one year old, has recovered from her injuries.

Newman’s $1,000 fine, which he is paying off monthly according to Smith, will cover the medical costs of treating the dog as well as the fees for boarding her at the shelter while the case was being tried. The six-month jail term was suspended, however.

A September hearing was set to determine who would gain custody of the dog, but Newman and his girlfriend, Marquita Calloway, gave up custody of the animal to the shelter. On Sept. 14, she was adopted out to a woman and her little girl.

"We had people lined up to adopt this dog," said Smith. "She became a shelter favorite, and we let her run up and down the halls."
Animal-control professionals know that not everyone who wishes to adopt an animal from a shelter will be allowed to do so -- even though the likely alternative for many animals is euthanasia. Experience has shown that lax adoption regulations bring additional suffering to thousands of animals adopted by irresponsible or unknowledgeable owners. While shelter workers are obligated to require certain basic treatment for adopted animals such as nourishing food, proper veterinary care, companionship, exercise, and surgery to prevent unwanted litters, they may neglect another important aspect of animal adoptions: A pet should be suited in size, temperament, physical requirements, and medical needs to its new owner's temperament, lifestyle, and needs. This may be a tall order, not easy to fill, but it must be filled to protect animals' welfare.

A family that lives in the heart of crowded Manhattan is making a very big mistake if it chooses -- and you allow it -- to adopt and confine an energetic Irish setter. No one should own a dog if his or her lifestyle prevents the animal from receiving regular outdoor exercise, affection or training. A nervous cat or dog could suffer greatly in a household full of active children.

Teach potential adopters the importance of choosing a pet that will fit easily and happily into its family. Assign a staff member, who is sensitive to this important aspect of adoption, to counsel adopters about it on a routine basis. Emphasize to adopters that they must plan ahead to provide humane and consistent obedience training for dogs -- and cats.

For animals, just "any" home won't do; only a "forever" home is satisfactory. ●